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Saturday Farmers' Market looks for growth off Vine

By Beverly Fortune
HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

This probably will be the final summer for the popular Saturday Farmers' Market on Vine Street.

Today, several members of the Lexington Farmers' Market said the market will move to make way for a major development project on the block bounded by Main and Vine streets, Limestone and Upper Street.

"We haven't been told definitely, but we're operating on the premise that this will be our last summer on Vine," said beekeeper Abigail Kean.

Farmers said if they have to move, they would like to find a permanent location where they can also build a covered market structure, possibly at the site of the Tuesday-Thursday Farmers' market at Broadway and Maxwell Street.

The Saturday market has been on Vine Street for about 20 years. Farmer Roland McIntosh said farmers have been told a hotel is planned for the Vine Street block.

Developer Dudley Webb, whose name has been mentioned in connection with the prime piece of downtown real estate, would not comment today except to say efforts are under way "to do something on the block."

Joe Rosenberg is the majority property owner of the block. He is out of the country and could not be reached for comment.

The owners of two parcels on the block said they have been approached about selling. Terry Grossman and his father Norman own 152 West Main where they have the Mad Hatter Hat Shop. He said, "As long as we have owned the building, Joe Rosenberg has kept up a dialogue with us about selling." The Grossmans bought their building about four years ago.

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Gordon Cummins, who owns the Triple Crown Lounge building at 121 South Limestone, also said he has been approached to sell. He declined to mention any names.

"This block is in the center of town, so it's ripe for development," said Terry Grossman, adding, "We hear lots and lots of rumors, but that's all they are, rumors."

The Farmers' Market received a \$12,500 grant from the Governor's Office of Agriculture Policy earlier this year to do a feasibility study of a permanent location for the market, said market manager Jeff Dabbelt. "We decided to go for pie in the sky and see what it would cost to do a covered structure."

The study, being done by David Freshwater, an agricultural economics professor at the University of Kentucky, is due in October.

Flower vendor Bob Early of Three Toads Farm said most farmers want to move permanently to the corner of South Broadway and West Maxwell Street, site of the Tuesday and Thursday markets. "It's downtown. Customers already know where it is and how to get there," Early said.

A market house would provide shelter for farmers and customers from summer's heat and also rain, as well as electricity, running water, bathrooms and an office for the market manager.

The one-acre site, part of the Lexington Center development, is leased to the market for about \$1,200 a year, said Bill Owen, executive director of Lexington Center Corp.

Owen said the 1976 master plan for the Lexington Center shows the corner as a possible site for a small hotel or condominiums. "That's been our thought that someday a private developer would come with a plan for that corner," he said. That, of course, would be eliminated if the Farmers' Market locates there permanently, he said.

"If their feasibility study reveals that they want to locate there, they would have to come to the Lexington Center board with an offer for the land," he said.

The board will look at "what is in the best interest of the Lexington Center and its mission as a convention, entertainment and sports venue for the city," Owen said. He said that could include the Farmers' Market, "but it's too preliminary right now to say."

Market manager Jeff Dabbelt said if the market could work out a deal with Lexington Center Corp. by next spring, the Saturday market would go ahead and move. "We want to get while the getting's good," he said. A structure could be built later.

With a permanent structure and a year-round schedule, the Farmers' Market could become "the grocery store for downtown," Dabbelt said. "That is my goal."

McIntosh said the market "has done so much for the city, the city should help us get this site and a permanent structure built." Dabbelt said possible financing for a market house could come from tobacco settlement money.

He didn't know what a market place would cost to build. "We expect to get some idea from the feasibility study," he said.

A permanent market house would allow the market to expand beyond the 63 farmers who

show up most Saturdays, Dabbelt said. "We could go to being a year-round market and that would be great. Farmers could build greenhouses to extend their growing season. That would create more of a market for Kentucky products."

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